DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 450 408 CS 217 455

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TITLE Enhancing Comprehension of Parables: Putting Children through Their P.A.C.E.S.
PUB DATE 2000-12-00
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education (31st, Sydney, Australia, December 4-7, 2000).
AVAILABLE FROM For full text: http://www.aare.edu.au/00pap/smi00364.htm.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Differences; *Folk Culture; Foreign Countries; *Literary Devices; Primary Education; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Research; *Reading Skills
IDENTIFIERS Australia; *Parables

ABSTRACT

Increasing multiculturalism and globalization have resulted in new literacies in Australia and other Western countries. "Reading between the lines" is a critical skill that children need to develop as they grapple with stories and information from other socio-cultural settings. The parable is an excellent conventional literary device for facilitating this skill because it contains a richness of implicit information within the text and an implicit overall message. This experimental study focussed on five conditions proposed to enhance learning: [p]ersonal meaning, [a]ction, [c]ollaboration, [e]mpowerment, and [s]elf-affirmation (p.a.c.e.s.). Four homogeneous primary groups (n=20) were compared for comprehension of a generic parable. There was a control group. The s. group had one condition of learning implemented. The s.a.c. group had three conditions implemented and the p.a.c.e.s. group had all five conditions implemented. It was expected there would be an increase in the comprehension of both the implicit content of the parable and its underlying message as a function of the increase in the number of conditions. Individual analyses of Tasks 3 & 4 (re: the overall meaning) indicated no significant effect. However, there was a significant difference between groups' performances on each of the tasks. Developmental factors are suggested to explain the differences. The complete picture will not be available until Task 1 and Task 2 are analyzed and all results integrated. Contains 20 references and 4 tables of data. (Author/RS)

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Enhancing comprehension of parables: Putting children through their p.a.c.e.s.

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Paper presented at the 31st Annual Conference of the Australian Association for Research in Education, 4 -7 December, 2000, Sydney, Australia.

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ABSTRACT

Increasing multiculturalism and globalisation have resulted in new literacies in Australia and other Western countries. "Reading between the lines" is a critical skill that children need to develop as they grapple with stories and information from other socio-cultural settings. The parable is an excellent conventional literary device for facilitating this skill, because it contains a richness of (a) implicit information within the text, and (b) an implicit overall message. This experimental study focussed on five conditions proposed to enhance learning: [p]ersonal meaning, [a]ction, [c]ollaboration, [e]mpowerment, and [s]elf-affirmation. Four homogeneous primary groups (n = 20) were compared for comprehension of a generic parable. There was a control group. The s. group had one condition of learning implemented. The s.a.c. group had three conditions implemented and the p.a.c.e.s. group had all five conditions implemented. It was expected there would be an increase in the comprehension of both the implicit content of the parable and its underlying message as a function of the increase in the number of conditions. Individual analyses of Tasks 3 & 4 (re: the overall meaning) indicated no significant effect. However, there was a significant difference between groups' performances on each of the tasks ($p < .001$). Developmental factors are suggested to explain the differences. The complete picture will not be available until Task 1 and Task 2 are analysed and all results integrated.

Introduction

Consider this scenario. People have aspirations towards a goal. They seek help from someone whom they trust to help them reach that goal. They are told that there will be costs involved in achieving the goal. As the costs mount they complain. The resolution comes when they accept the costs more readily, coming to a better understanding of the balance between pain and gain. Alternatively resolution may come when they choose to forego the goal because the costs are too high.

The moral of this scenario-"no pain, no gain"-is an important one and is of universal significance. We can assume that most people will have had some experience with this moral by the time they reach their teenage years. This is a scenario that crosses cultural boundaries. When translated into a story it may be represented in diverse ways such as the purchase of a plot of land to grow rice on, training for the Olympics, learning to walk again after an accident, traversing frozen wilds for some desired goal, confronting racial or economic barriers to get an education or choosing to live a certain way (e.g. as a Christian, a Muslim or in a commune).

As children grow we want them to learn this moral and others like it. Yet despite the fact that the underlying message of such stories crosses cultural boundaries, the context, content and idiom may be located in culture specific terms. As Australia becomes more multicultural, children are being exposed to texts that are more likely to use character names that are unknown to the reader's eyes and ears. Such texts may mention also places, common nouns and phrases that are outside the reader's pool of background knowledge even when translated into English. They may even encompass goals that may not be seen as desirable by the reader. In this context, children need to learn how (a) to get at the moral that is implicit in the story, and (b) to translate that moral to other situations, including their own. Thus, as students are increasingly confronted by such texts as a result of growing multiculturalism the need to be able to "read between the lines" increases-the need to access both the literal and implied meanings.

Text orientation prior to reading is always a helpful device (DET, 1998a,1998b) although Tierney and Pearson (1994:496) have argued that "(r)eaders should be encouraged to actively engage their background knowledge prior to, during and after reading". However, with stories where the overall message is implicit, children (and adults?) may well miss the point of such stories even if they do have the requisite background knowledge to understand all the concrete or explicit images. That is because narrative texts are not always written with just a surface meaning.

The Parable as a Narrative Form

The parable is an excellent literary device for helping children "read between the lines", especially for the purpose of extracting a moral. But just what is a parable? What are its distinctive characteristics?

Before we discuss the parable as a narrative form it is important to note that, although the word "parable" is often connected in Western cultures with those parables Jesus Christ told, parables can be found in most cultures. As Hunter (1969:53) reminds us, "Jesus did not invent the parable" although he used it frequently.

The parable is a specific subset of the narrative form. The word "parable" has its origins in the mathematical parabola, that curious shape which is mirrored around an axis (Macquarie Dictionary,1995:680). As a narrative, the parable has a social purpose and structure. The accompanying Modules section of the NSW English K-6 Syllabus (DET,1998b) defines the social purpose of the narrative this way:

> Narratives construct a pattern of events with a problematic and/or unexpected outcome that entertains or instructs the reader or listener. Narratives entertain because they deal with the unusual and unexpected development of events. *They instruct because they teach readers and listeners that problems should be confronted, and attempts made to resolve them. Narratives incorporate patterns of behaviour that are generally highly valued.* (p. 113) [Our emphasis]

In contrast to the allegory, the parable is "brief and typically shows the application of a moral precept to a familiar situation" (Reader's Digest,1969:12). So it is an ideal device with which to teach children all sorts of morals, not just the message "no pain, no gain".

The Problem

The major difficulty in using the parable is that it is written on two levels-the explicit level, and the implicit level. Therefore, when children are asked to explain what a parable is about they could give two possible explanations-the explicit story and the implicit message. So how can we know whether children are able to infer the implicit message when they read a parable?

In addition, the English K-6 document stresses the need for the intentional teaching of text types. Yet,

when confronted by the parable with its explicit story and its implicit message, such as is the case in the story *The Oak Seedling*, the teacher is still confronted by the question, "What is the best way to intentionally teach something that is, by definition, implicit?"

The p.a.c.e.s. Conditions of Learning

We, as authors of this paper, believe that one way of doing that is by the explicit use of the conditions of learning (Holliday,1994,1997; Harrison,1999a,1999b; Smith King & Harrison,1998,2000). We also believe that the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning may enhance learning in all educational contexts with this study providing one investigation of that hypothesis.

The S.P.A.C.E. conditions of learning were initially identified as a cluster necessary for teacher learning by Holliday (1994,1997). Since then the conditions have been defined more clearly using an educational psychology framework (Harrison,1999a,1999b). They have also been tested with adults by Harrison (1999a,1999b) and by Smith King and Harrison (1998,2000). Harrison's revised conditions were first given the acronym s.p.a.c.e. to differentiate them from Holliday's work. Harrison's current definitions (1999a,1999b) place more emphasis on psychological and developmental influences wheresas Holliday's current emphasis is on teaching method. Harrison's current conditions, defined this way, are now called the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning to reduce confusion although the relationship between the two sets of conditions is strong.

Initial testing (Harrison, 1999a,1999b; Smith King & Harrison, 1998) has indicated these conditions enhance adult learning in a variety of situations. Thus, our quanitative studies have provided experimental support for Holliday's qualitative research findings. For example we know that, while teacher educators and teacher trainees both need these conditions if learning is to be enhanced, the two groups have differing perceptions of which of these conditions are most valuable for pre-service teachers (Harrison,1999a). Teacher trainers believe that pre-service teachers most need [p]ersonal meaning whereas the pre-service teachers themselves state they need to feel good about their learning ([s]elf-affirmation). The testing done with children follows the description of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning.

The p.a.c.e.s. conditions are [p]ersonal meaning, [a]ction, [c]ollaboration, [e]mpowerment and [s]elf-affirmation. Although these five conditions of learning are treated as separate entities in this paper, in reality, they usually work together, with increased degrees of synergy maximising learning. The concept of synergy in this context means that the greater the number of conditions that are implemented the greater improvement in learning.

A brief description of the five conditions of learning by Harrison (1999a;1999b) follows. It is important to note that each of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning can be located within recognized psychological frameworks (Harrison,1999b). It is also important to note that this framework does not negate research findings in regards to each of the conditions, or any global learning theories. Rather they provide a more formal way of thinking about, and using, such findings.

[p]ersonal meaning

The [p]ersonal meaning condition must be present because students need to think about the learning outcome in a way that makes sense to them. The focus here is *intellectual*. The teacher may help students to work mentally with their own and others' opinions, ideas, theories and the like, so they can retain, discard, or blend these as personal meaning is achieved.

[a]ction.

The [a]ction condition must be present because many students need to do in order to learn. The focus of this condition is *physical*. (At the teacher's prompting or on their own initiative), students use their bodies as well as other physical resources to make real or concrete what is being learned.

[c]ollaboration.

The [c]ollaboration condition must be present because many students need to connect, communicate and cooperate with relevant others while achieving the learning outcome. The focus here is *social*. The teacher must ensure that students are not isolated while attempting to learn. For their part, students must recognise when to collaborate with others and when to work alone.

[e]mpowerment

The [e]mpowerment condition must be present because students need to be able to shape the learning process. The focus here is *motivational*. The teacher grants, and the students must seek, autonomy, self-direction and appropriate control over learning. [s]elf-affirmation

This condition must be present because students need to have a positive perception of themselves as learners. The focus of this condition is *emotional*. The teacher gives constructive, perhaps corrective, feedback to the effect that the student is good at learning. Alternatively, students can provide their own feedback.

p.a.c.e.s., Children and Literacy

The first study to test the p.a.c.e.s. conditions with children was conducted by Smith King and Harrison (2000). The context was an after-hours literacy centre where a staff worker had consciously and consistently implemented the conditions to optimise the children's ability to read aloud fluently with a high level of comprehension. That study indicated that both children and parents perceived significant differences
($p < .002$) in regard to each of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning when comparing behaviours before and after entry into the centre. The study provided quantitative data to support the qualitative data from parents and children concerning the perceived changes that parents had seen in their children's oral reading behaviours. In other words both children and parents perceived that there had been significant increases in the degree to which children knew how to make sense of what they were reading ([p]ersonal meaning), actually read books ([a]ction), worked with others in that process ([c]ollaboration), took far greater control over the reading process ([e]mpowerment), and felt good about themselves as readers ([s]elf-affirmation).

The current study was undertaken to further test the application of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning to children. We wanted to know if the p.a.c.e.s conditions of learning would facilitate the ability of children to "read between the lines"-to get to the implicit overall message of a generic parable. It is the first study to use a control group and three of groups experiencing progressively more of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning. Specifically there was a control group for whom there were no conditions present, a group for whom [s]elf-affirmation was present, a group for whom [s]elf-affirmation, [a]ction and [c]ollaboration were present, and a group for whom all five p.a.c.e.s. conditions were present. It was expected that synergy would be demonstrated, in that there would be an understanding of the parable across the groups as the number of conditions increased.

Method

The Setting and Pre-testing

The setting for the study was a large established metropolitan government-funded primary school in an upper middle class area that is still being developed. Experienced and energetic staff contribute to the positive ethos of the school. Ninety two of the 120 children in the year had parental permission to participate in the study. These children's proficiency in cloze procedures was assessed using Form B of the Sentence Completion Test component of the Group Reading Test II (NFER-Nelson,1998). A pretest was used to select which grade was most appropriate for the study. Six children from each grade participated in the pretests (above average, average and below average readers).

Subjects

The reading ages of the children who participated in the study ranged from more than 12.03 years to 6.04 years. This range was skewed towards the upper reading levels. Indeed, the reading ages of the middle 50% ranged from 8.6 years to 12.03+ years with the median scores across all groups ranging from 11.06 years to 12.03 years. These results confirm the Basic Skills data that children at this school are better than average readers generally. Informal observations in the school confirm these results. Chronologically, seven children in Year 3 are aged between 7.0 and 7.11 years, one hundred children are between 8.0 and 8.11 years and seventeen children are between 9 and 9.11 years.

Formulation of the groups

The Group Reading Test results were used to form four equivalent groups of 20 students (n=80) with twelve reserves spaced evenly across ability levels. There were four experimental groups (a control group, the s. group, the s.a.c. group and the p.a.c.e.s. group). The study was designed this way because we wanted to test the notion of synergy. In other words, we wanted to show that as the numbers of conditions increased, so would the comprehension of the implicit message of the parable. The provision of reserves proved a wise precaution because three reserves were needed; one in each group except the s. group. The reserves had scored very similar scores on the original reading assessment to the children they were replacing.

The Parable

The scenario given at the beginning of this paper underpins the parable called *The Oak Seedling* (Arcodia, 1991). This story was chosen for this study with the explicit story charting the horticultural process by which a ranger could encourage an oak seedling to reach its potential. The author, however, has exercised literary license and has given the oak seedling human feeling and thought. The common phrase or proverb, "no pain, no gain" could sum up the implied message of the story. Although the ranger reminds the oak seedling *it* had asked for help in becoming a large oak tree, the "no pain, no gain" message that is inferred from this story (and transferred to other familiar situations) is not stated.

Even though various oak trees are found all over the world, the *Quercus robur* is most commonly regarded as "the" oak tree in European countries (World Book,1992). Nevertheless, since the story could translate to any very large tree, it was deemed to cross cultural barriers. Children were shown a picture of an oak tree and a seedling so there would be no confusion about what an oak tree might look like.

The Study Design

A diagrammatic representation of the entire study (Table 1.) can be found on page 10. The study used a classic experimental design-four experimental groups (a control group, s. group, the s.a.c. group and the

p.a.c.e.s group).

The [s]elf-affirmation condition was implemented in the s., s.a.c. and p.a.c.e.s. groups by affirming the children in their ability to learn and to work appropriately. In keeping these levels equivalent across the groups it was necessary to transpose some affirming sentences later in the script for the s.a.c. and p.a.c.e.s. groups so that children with more to do would not receive all their [s]elf-affirmation all at once.

Table 1.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN: The p.a.c.e.s conditions of learning in the primary school: Optimisin explicit content of parables.

Control Group (n~20)	s. Group (n~20)	s.a.c. Group (n~20)	p.a.c.e.s. Group (n~20
None of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning explcitly implemented.	Children affirmed in the learning they have done and in the work they will do. That implements the [s]elf affirmation condition of learning. This affirmation continued with the other two groups.	In addition to being affirmed as learners, children do a role-play in pairs. That implements the [a]ction and [c]ollaboration conditions of learning.	In addition to the role- in their learning, the ch options ([e]mpowerme they choose to come to what the message of th meaning).
ASSESS-MENT **TASKS: All groups do the same tasks**	TASK 1: Cloze Test [20 responses-each a choice of 1 per 5 possible) TASK 2: Child writes about message [SOLO Taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982)]. TASKS 3 & 4: Multiple choice. Teacher reads. 5 responses for each task re writer's message. Fram		

[p]ersonal meaning, [a]ction, [c]ollaboration, [e]mpowerment , [s]elf-affirmation (Harrison,1998a)

The children in the s.a.c. group and the p.a.c.e.s. group were also given the "thumbs up" sign in lieu of verbal affirmation after the drama components.

Table 1 shows how the [a]ction and [c]ollaboration conditions of learning were overtly introduced in the s.a.c. group and the p.a.c.e.s. group. In practical terms this meant facilitating a small drama exercise during which the children worked in pairs to produce "frozen moments" of (a) the seedling, (b) the ranger and (c) one part of the story.

When it came to introducing the [e]mpowerment and [p]ersonal meaning conditions into the final experimental group (see Table 1.), in practical terms that meant giving the children a choice from a number of activities designed to help them come to their own understanding of the message of *The Oak Seedling*. These activities included drawing, writing, cartooning and selecting which story of three small stories had the same message as *The Oak Seedling*.

In writing the scripts for the four groups, great care was taken to maintain the level of the conditions across the three experimental groups. It was challenging to set up the control group with none of the conditions present while maintaining minimum ethical standards of teaching. That problem was addressed by regarding the situation as if the children were sitting for an examination supervised by external examiners using a script.

Assessment Measures

Please note that this particular paper reports only the results of the children's understanding of the writer's message and how he gets that across (Tasks 3 & 4). The results of Tasks 1 and 2 will be reported in future papers when the analysis is complete.

Both Task 3 and Task 4 concern the overall message of the parable and how the writer conveys that message.

Task 3

Holdaway (1972:114-115) has listed five qualities of writing: truthfulness, clarity, relevance to life, tone/manner and the author's point of view. Each of these qualities may be discussed by using the following emphases: reality, affect, coherence and humanity. The humanity aspect deals with the moral value and sensitivity of each of the five qualities of writing and words from these lists were used to design the five multiple-choice questions in Task 3.

Task 4

This task also used five multiple-choice questions to discover if the children were able to (a) sort out what the main message of the parable was (two questions), (b) match the message to a selection of proverbs (two questions), and (c) come to a conclusion about the overall structure and purpose of the parable (one question).

Results

What Task 3 alone can tell us

No significant differences were detected between the four groups when an analysis of variance was conducted. Further analysis of sub-groups (very able readers, able readers and less able readers) yielded the same result. Nevertheless, an analysis of Task 3 question by answer by group provides a picture of how these children regarded what the writer was attempting to do (Table 2, below).

Most children in each group were able to recognise that the writer was "trying to make an important point about life and living" (Qu.3). A large majority in each group also recognised the story was meant "to teach a lesson" (Qu.4)-"to help [the readers] think about the costs involved in choosing important goals" (Qu.5). However, there was far less certainty about whether the writer was "right in his view about how hard it was for the seedling to become a fine oak tree as he really wanted to" (Qu.1). Group figures for indicating that "the story was harder to understand because it was written on two levels" (Qu.2) are surprising given that all groups were told that in the introduction to the lesson.

Table 2.

Task 3: Main responses by percentages per group

Question	Incorrect Response	Group Percentages	Correct Response	Group Percentages
1	The writer was all mixed up about how hard it was for the seedling to become a fine oak tree as he really wanted to.	Control Group 20% s. Group 20% s.a.c. Group 20% p.a.c.e.s.Group 30%	The writer was right about how hard it was for the seedling to become a fine oak tree as he really wanted to.	Control Group 40% s.Group 40% s.a.c.Group 55% p.a.c.e.s.Group55%
2	The writer gets the message of his story all mixed up.	Control Group 25% s. Group 15% s.a.c. Group 10% p.a.c.e.s. Group 10%	The writer is telling a story that is hard to understand because it is written on two levels.	Control Group 55% s. Group 75% s.a.c. Group 70% p.a.c.e.s.Group70%
3	The writer of "The Oak Seedling" has written a story that is not related to real life at all.	Control Group 15% s. Group 0% s.a.c. Group 0% p.a.c.e.s Group 20%	The writer of The Oak Seedling" has written a story that is trying to make an important point about life.	Control Group 85% s.Group 100% s.a.c. Group 90% p.a.c.e.s.Group 80%
4	The writer has written a story that is meant to be witty and funny.	Control Group 5% s. Group 10% s.a.c. Group 10% p.a.c.e.s. Group 5%	The writer has written a story that is meant to teach a lesson.	Control Group 70% s. Group 80% s.a.c. Group 85% p.a.c.e.s.Group 85%
5	The story, "The Oak Seedling" is written as if by someone who doesn't know what life is all about.	Control Group 15% s. Group 0% s.a.c. Group 0% p.a.c.e.s. Group 20%	The story "The Oak Seedling" is written as if the write is trying to get people to think about the costs of choosing some important goals.	Control Group 70% s. Group 80% s.a.c. Group 75% p.a.c.e.s.Group 85%

What Task 4 alone can tell us

Task 4 required the children to (a) sort out what the main message of the parable was, (b) match the message to a selection of proverbs, and (c) come to a conclusion about the overall structure and purpose of the parable. This task proved to be much more difficult for the children than Task 3. No significant differences were detected between the four groups when an analysis of variance was conducted. Further analysis of sub-groups (very able readers, able readers and less able readers) yielded the same result. Nevertheless, an analysis of Task 4 question by answer by group provides a picture of what these children believed the message of the story was (Table 3, p. 14).

When forced to choose between categorizing the story as "a story written on two levels-the actual story and how it can be applied" and "a story written for kindergarten children to help them learn how to grow plants" there was a drop in the number of children who had previously identified the story as being written on two levels in Task 3. This focusing on a literal or concrete interpretation when confronted with the task of selecting proverbs with the same message given by The Oak Seedling can be seen in the

selection of "little strokes fell great oaks" (Qu.4) over "no rose without a thorn". The same pattern can be seen in Question 3 in regards to the selection of the more literal "don't chop down a forest to make a piece of paper" over the implied "no pain, no gain" message. In comparing the responses of these two questions it could be hypothesized that children would be more familiar with the "no pain, no gain" saying than the "no rose without a thorn" proverb. Again, of particular interest is that so few children were able to indicate that the story had been written on two levels-the actual story and how it can be applied (Qu.5), when all groups had been given that information at the beginning of the lesson. Of particular interest is that even though at least 70% of the children had figured out that the story was "making an important point about life and living" (Task 3), far less were able to work out that the point was "giving up one thing for the sake of something else" (Qu.2) or "what we want may mean we go through hard times" (Qu.1).

Table 3.

Task 4: Main responses by percentages per group

Question	Incorrect Response	Group Percentages	Correct Response	Group Percentages
1	The purpose of "The Oak seedling" is to remind us growing up takes time.	Control Group 50% s. Group 45% s.a.c. Group 40% p.a.c.e.s.Group 85%	The purpose of "The Oak seedling" is to remind us what we want can mean we will go through hard times.	Control Group 25% s. Group 5% s.a.c. Group 45% p.a.c.e.sGroup 10%
2	"The Oak Seedling" is a story about understanding what the rules are.	Control Group 20% s. Group 10% s.a.c. Group 15% p.a.c.e.s Group 25%	"The Oak Seedling" is a story about the giving up of one thing for the sake of something else.	Control Group 40% s. Group 25% s.a.c. Group 45% p.a.c.e.s.Group35%
3	"The Oak Seedling" is an example of which saying: "Don't chop down a forest to make a piece of paper".	Control Group 60% s. Group 50% s.a.c. Group 50% p.a.c.e.s.Group 55%	"The Oak Seedling" is an example of which saying: "No pain; no gain".	Control Group 30% s. Group 35% s.a.c. Group 45% p.a.c.e.s.Group35%
4	The message of "The Oak Seedling" is like which of these sayings: "Little strokes fell great oaks".	Control Group 80% s. Group 70% s.a.c. Group 80% p.a.c.e.s.Group 80%	The message of "The Oak Seedling" is like which of these sayings: "No rose without a thorn".	Control Group 15% s. Group 10% s.a.c. Group 15% p.a.c.e.s Group10%
5	"The Oak Seedling" is a story written for kindergarten children-to help them to learn	Control Group 55% s. Group 75%	"The Oak Seedling" is a story written on two levels-the story and the way it could be	Control Group 40%

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	to grow plants.	s.a.c. Group 45% p.a.c.e.s.Group 35%	applied generally to things in life.	s. Group 25% s.a.c. Group 50% p.a.c.e.s.Group55%

What comparing Task 3 and Task 4 can tell us

A t-test for related measures was carried out for each of the groups. The children in every group found Task 3 significantly easier than Task 4. Table 4 indicates the results of these tests.

Table 4.

Summary of t_{rel} tests comparing children's results Task 3 versus Task 4

	Task 3			Task 4			
Group	Mean	SD		Mean	SD	Results	
Control	3.2	1.5		1.5	1.2	t_{rel} (19) = 4.3	$p < .001$
s.	3.8	1.1		1.3	1.4	t_{rel} (19) = 8.6	$p < .000$
s.a.c.	3.8	1.4		2.1	1.7	t_{rel} (19) = 5.5	$p < .000$
p.a.c.e.s.	3.6	1.3		1.6	1.2	t_{rel} (19) = 5.0	$p < .000$

These results tell us that, while the children were able to discern that the writer had an important message to get across in his story, when it came to (a) sorting out what the main message of the parable was, (b) matching the message to a selection of proverbs, and (c) coming to a conclusion about the overall structure and purpose of the parable, the task was just too difficult.

Discussion

The current study was undertaken to further test the application of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning to children. We wanted to know if the p.a.c.e.s conditions of learning would facilitate the ability of children to "read between the lines"-to get to the implicit overall message of a generic parable. It is the first study to use a control group and three of groups experiencing progressively more of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning. Specifically there was a control group for whom there were no conditions present, a group for whom [s]elf-affirmation was present, a group for whom [s]elf-affirmation, [a]ction and [c]ollaboration were present, and a group for whom all five p.a.c.e.s conditions were present. It was expected that synergy would be demonstrated, in that there would be an understanding of the parable across the groups as the number of conditions increased.

In Incomplete Picture

Indications of an effect in Tasks 3 and 4 of this study are minimal. However, it is important to remember that there are other data (Tasks 1 and 2) that will be examined to give a clearer picture of what happened across all groups. Until that happens the picture will be incomplete and most of the findings can only be tentative.

Some Initial Observations

There are three main tentative observations that can be drawn from this study. One involves the notion of synergy. The other two observations appear to be of a developmental nature though the data are not conclusive at this stage.

Task 3-The importance of treating the p.a.c.e.s. conditions as a cluster?

An examination of the correct responses in Task 3 shows a pattern that, while not statistically significant, nevertheless appears to indicate that there were benefits to the children who were in the experimental groups as opposed to the control group (see means in Table 4.). We had expected to see increasing comprehension with an increase in the number of conditions across the groups, that is, synergy. Instead, it appears all three groups that were exposed to the conditions in some way, all equally out-preformed the control group. This was the kind of pattern we had hypothesised, although we had expected a larger effect. It may be that what we are seeing is further evidence of the well-known effect of affirming children as they work. Alternatively it may have been that factors such as tiredness or pressure of time may have influenced the results sufficiently to negate an effect from the implementation of the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning. A more plausible explanation may well have been that we did not treat the conditions as a cluster, operating synergetically, as in the literacy centre study that also involved children (Smith King & Harrison,2000).

Task 4-Indications of developmental effects?

A look at Table 3 will show that the s.a.c. Group performed better than the p.a.c.e.s. group on four of the five questions. They performed comparably on the other question. Since the p.a.c.e.s. group had all five conditions, we need to ask whether the actual tasks chosen for the implementation of the [p]ersonal meaning and [e]mpowerment conditions were too difficult for these children.

Do children learn and develop as Vygotsky has suggested? Or do they develop and then learn as Piaget suggests? These children would mostly be in what Piaget regards as the concrete operational stage (McInerney & McInerney, 1998). Yet the task required they draw out an implicit meaning. Perhaps, in asking them to draw or write it may have been that we pointed the children to the concrete elements of the story as opposed to the non-concrete message we were trying to draw attention to.

There is some evidence of this, for six of the seven children who chose the non-drawing/non-writing task that required them to select from three small stories the one with the message most like *The Oak Seedling* chose a story that ended "(b)ut it was worth it" (p.a.c.e.s. Group Subjects 02, 04, 06, 12, 15 and 18). Four of the six who did that were further able to differentiate that the Olympic story had the pain-gain elements (p.a.c.e.s. Group Subjects 02, 06, 15 and 18). Only one of the seven children said that a story where the main character became a star instantaneously was like that of *The Oak Seedling* (Subject 07 in the p.a.c.e.s. Group). A check of the answer sheets indicates that Subject 07 was the only one in this sub-set who scored zero on Task 3, the task that was generally well done across groups (cf. Results of Task 3 above).

Or could it be that these children had not reached Vogotsky's third and final stage of conceptual development, namely the formation of abstract concepts similar to adult concept formation

(Solso,1991:384-5)? We will need to further examine these data and the other data that have yet to be examined before we can hypothesise what these results do tell us and the developmental issues that will need to be addressed more fully.

Comparing Tasks 3 and 4-Another developmental issue to address?

The comparison between Tasks 3 and 4 also seems to suggest that developmental factors may have caused the statistically significant differences we have noted. The most obvious explanation appears to be that Task 4 was just too hard for these children. They appeared to find the task of (a) sorting out what the main message of the parable was, (b) matching the message to a selection of proverbs, and (c) coming to a conclusion about the overall structure and purpose of the parable, just too difficult. The question is, though, was it too difficult because these children were not developmentally ready for such tasks, or was it too hard because they had had little experience of those kinds of tasks. A conversation with the principal after the study had finished but before the tasks had been marked revealed that the recent Basic Skills testing had shown a general weakness in the school in regards to literary devices such as proverbs despite a general proficiency in literacy areas. Further investigation will need to address these questions.

Experimental Issues

Consciously and consistently implementing the p.a.c.e.s. conditions of learning has been shown to help children with problems in oral reading (Smith King & Harrison,2000). The very significant results from that study are in marked contrast to the overall lack of definitive evidence in this study. We hoped to show that explicitly implementing the conditions as we have done would help children increasingly able to get to the main message of the story. It did not happen that way. Therefore we need to ask what these results are telling us.

The most obvious difference between these two studies is the way that the conditions were implemented. In the Smith King and Harrison (2000) study, the conditions were implemented simultaneously. In other words, there was no attempt to separate conditions that had been identified as (a) being necessary for learning, and (b) operating in synergy. It proved difficult to isolate these conditions in classroom conditions and it may be that one lesson from this study could be that problems have arisen through trying to treat the conditions separately when, in real life, they operate simultaneously.

Another issue to consider is the time factor. This study involves one story and one lesson. We are asking the children to do something that is difficult, namely get to the implied overall message of the story. Can we actually expect them to learn to do that on one occasion? Is the lesson that it is the sustained implementation of the conditions that makes the difference-as we saw in the Smith King and Harrison (2000) study on oral reading?

Implications of the differences between Task 3 and Task 4

There is prima face evidence that many teachers in the classroom would see that these children have mostly understood what the writer was trying to say (Task 3). However, the results from comparing how the children in each group performed on Task 3 in comparison with Task 4 suggest that such understanding may not be sufficiently robust for those children to look past the concrete when confronted with the task of sorting out what the main message of the parable was, and matching the message to a selection of proverbs. In addition it may not be sufficient for coming to a conclusion about the overall structure and purpose of the parable even though the children had been given that information

at the beginning of the lesson.

In the absence of definitive conclusions at this stage, perhaps the best advice teachers could take on board would be to encourage children who do have the ability to get past concrete information to believe in their own abilities to discover the hidden message of such story. This is especially true where a parable *does* have a given explanation and the task for teachers is to help children make the link between the story components and the implied message.

However, where there is no explanation of the parable, the teacher needs to consciously enhance children's comprehension of the implicit message of parable as well as helping them make the links between the sections of the parable and the underlying message. For those children who find it difficult to move past the concrete information, the teacher may be able to help best by (a) telling them what the message was (b) walking them through the story step by step, and (c) showing the children how the story can be likened to an example children may understand.

Regardless, the teacher needs to be aware that such a difficult task for children needs to be taught as a unit, not as a "one off" lesson. Children need to be trained to look beneath the surface of written materials. Parables are a useful way of doing that because they are short, but richly laden with implicit information.

Conclusion

Reading "between the lines" increases in importance as children progress through the school system. The need to understand what is not stated explicitly in textbooks and in general school communications may even become more, rather than less complex over time. Getting the most of all written material becomes even more important as we as a nation are reminded of the

> renewed importance of literacies as cultural capital production and representation requisite both for the maintenance and articulation of existing economic and political power, and for the critique and redistribution of that power among marginalised groups. Literacy is about equity. (Luke & Gilbert, 1993:1)

The need to understand what is implied as well as that which is stated with concrete words and images is increasing as the information explosion continues. Not understanding implied messages could result in decisions that would not have been taken had such messages been taken in.

We know that the p.a.c.e.s. conditions do help children read significantly better orally-including with a significantly increased comprehension of what they have read (Smith King & Harrison,2000). While there is some evidence that implementing these conditions can help some children understand the overall implied message of a parable, the picture is far from complete. It is expected that further analysis of additional data at hand may give a clearer picture and help answer the questions raised in this paper.

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